

Assessing Zimbabwe Government of National Unity, 2009-2013: Successes and Challenges in restoring sustainable peace and sanity

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Abstract

Governments of National Unity (GNU) are becoming the norm in the world and in Africa in particular. Most countries adopt this approach hoping to resolve post-election conflicts, civil wars, ethnic confrontations and power struggles that have plagued Sub-Saharan Africa. The focus of this work is to assess the successes and challenges of Zimbabwe's GNU in restoring sustainable peace and sanity. It looks at the socio-economic and political problems experienced before the signing of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) which gave birth to the consummation of the GNU. The formation of GNU to the two MDCs it was a honeymoon period whereas to ZANU-PF it was a breathing moment as the two warring political parties had different hidden agendas other than the aim of the GPA; hence it was formed on shaky foundation and sour relationships. The GNU as it became to be known as the inclusive government was an agreement of three major political parties that are Zimbabwe African National Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai (MDC T) and Movement for Democratic Change-Mutambara (MDC M). ZANU-PF was led by former president Robert G. Mugabe, MDC T by the late former Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai and MDC M by former Deputy Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara. Although they worked together their relationship was like oil and water which never mix. It was characterized by threats of disagreements, disinterest, disengagements and re-engagements among the key actors. Negotiations started on 21 September 2008 following months of political confrontations accompanied by socio-economic recession. The negotiation table was facilitated by former South African president Thabo Mbeki as the mediator. 11 February 2009 marked the consummation of the inclusive government. Although it managed to bring some sigh of relief, it cannot be glorified through and through because inclusive governments in Zimbabwe have failed to achieve the ultimate goal. The three entered into the 'marriage union' suspicious over each other, handcuffed and unwilling to cooperate. Although they seemed to work together, the inclusive government was not people oriented rather it was a GNU of individuals who were pursuing to achieve different goals.

Keywords: Government of national unity, global political agreement, inclusive government

Introduction

GNU is when all major political parties in a country form a transitional or temporary government. According to Mukuhlani (2014) the term GNU is used to refer to a case in which all the major political parties in a country form a governing coalition. GNU in most cases is seen as the 'best' option to resolve political, economic and social disputes. In Africa, some countries such as Kenya and Sierra Leone adopted this approach to resolve such disputes. According to Mapuva (2010) cited in Mukuhlani (2014) GNU's are a fragile, acrimonious, usually transitional arrangement with a high risk of disintegrating at the slightest opportunity. The Zimbabwean GNU was born out of chaos, dispute, failure to accept defeat, accusations and unwillingness to cooperate. For Robert Mugabe and his ZANU-PF the GNU was a breathing space following a prolonged period of much struggling to keep the country running whereas for the two MDCs it was a period of honeymoon because they enjoyed for the first time the privilege of being in inclusive government. The inclusive government was aimed at ending political disputes, bringing new reforms in the media, judiciary and civil service. As Goredema (2013) noted that the inclusive government was mandated to bring socio-economic stability, it was hoped and anticipated by many local, regional and international actors that it was to deliver lasting solution to the problems Zimbabwe was facing of gross violation of human rights and socio-economic recession. The inclusive government was believed to be the Moses whose role was to set free Zimbabweans out of bondage, thugocracy and black oppression. Ruhanya (2010) also submitted that inclusive governments are like the Biblical Moses whose role was to deliver the people of Israel out of oppression in Egypt to Canaan the promised land of 'milk and honey' where they could enjoy their freedoms. As such the GNU slightly succeeded to restore back sanity and there was a moment of peace. It also managed to restore hope and for a moment, it stabilized the economy although it cannot be applauded through and through because there were many challenges that it faced. The three political parties thus were forced by the prevailing crises and turbulence to enter into this marriage union.

Background to the formation of the GNU

Prior to the formation of the GNU the country was experiencing deep crises. There was serious economic recession, political madness; social outcry and the rule of law had reached at a point of non existence. According to Sachikonye (2009) the period from 2000-2008 was a “lost decade”. It was Zimbabwe’s tumultuous period. Bratton and Masunungure (2011) viewed it as “a crisis decade”.

The economy had lapsed. There was shortage of money and fuel characterized by winding long queues all over the country. Inflation was extremely high. The Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) was bankrupt. The then former RBZ governor Gideon Gono printed papers into money and implemented price control to combat inflation but it was a total failure. Bribery and robbery was the means to survive and source of income. According to Sachikonye (2009) there were endemic shortages of basic consumer goods.

Mukuhlani (2014) noted that as a result of sour relations between the ZANU PF government and the West, most multinational companies such as Lever Brothers scaled down and majority of the companies relocated. Foreign investors de-invested their capital and most companies closed. Large mines such as Shabanie Mine and Mashava among others closed while others scaled down operation.

Due to the land reform program which was widely condemned by Western countries, the European Union (EU) and America on allegations of abusing human rights, the ZANU-PF led government was sanctioned and blacklisted. Zimbabwe thus in 2003 was forced to withdraw from the Commonwealth which worsened the economic and social conditions. Due to economic recession, large health institutions collapsed. Government hospitals such as Parirenyatwa, UBH, Mpilo and Chitungwiza dilapidated and became death traps. Mukuhlani (2014) argues that doctors and nurses were continuously on strike and there were no drugs in referral hospitals. Mortality rate increased and diseases spread and wiped thousands of people.

Civil servants could hardly sustain themselves due to inflation which affected their salaries. To make matters worse there was a point when salaries were being delayed and civil servants could go for some weeks even months without being paid. There was a time when pensioners were not paid due to shortage of money. Some

government and private institutions retrenched workers to minimize costs. Unemployment rate increased beyond imagination. Many people fled to neighboring countries and overseas such as South Africa, Botswana and the United Kingdom (UK). Makumbe (2009) noted that three to four million Zimbabweans were said to have migrated to South Africa, Botswana, USA, Britain and Australia among other countries.

Cities and towns were in a deplorable and sorry state. There was a great deal of misery. Due to economic collapse, local governments such as Harare City council, Chitungwiza and Bulawayo could hardly repair broken sewer and water pipes. As such water was pumped untreated because of lack of adequate chemicals. In worst cases, urban dwellers could go for weeks without receiving a drop of water which forced people to drink from contaminated and unprotected sources. According to Mkandawire et al, in 2008, four thousand two hundred eighty seven (4 287) people died as a result of cholera outbreak and it brought the economy to a standstill as it worsened the situation which was already bad. There was an increased power cut or load shedding which heavily affected the whole country as people could receive electricity less than three hours per day and sometimes could go for days without power.

Schools were forced to close. Higher learning institutions such as University of Zimbabwe (UZ), Midlands State University (MSU), National University of Science and Technology (NUST), Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) and Chinhoyi University of Science Technology (CUT) closed for one semester. To make matters worse, the 2007-2008 agriculture season received very low rainfall and it was declared a national drought. The conditions were so pathetic and undesired.

The political terrain was inflicted by political madness and struggle for power. Mukuhani (2014) said it was very volatile. There were political disputes between ZANU-PF and the two MDCs. Morgan Tsvangirai had withdraw from the election race days before the voting day of the June 2008 presidential run-off citing political violence, intimidation and torture against his supporters and members. People's homes and properties were burnt and destroyed. There were cases of disappearance, abductions, killings, police detention and harassment of suspected MDC members and supporters by ZANU-PF youth militia, war veterans and members

of the uniformed forces. These conditions led to the formation of a coalition government to address the pathetic situation.

Research methodology

Data for this work was collected through critical analysis of secondary sources. Desktop research was also applied to gather the much needed information. The research was qualitative. There was no attempt to carry out interviews, but however that did not compromise the validity of the product in any way.

GNU concept

Academic scholars have to this day not agreed on the correct definition of the term GNU. Some have defined it as a temporal government for a particular period; a transitional government whereas others define it as political settlements to end disputes. Others prefer to define it as political agreements of major political parties to resolve pertinent issues while some say it is a coalition government to end dispute. Mukuhani (2014) suggested that some conceptions point towards political settlements as 'one off' events, or deals; others suggest that settlements are better used to describe the on-going institutional arrangements and political processes that both reflect and shape the (no doubt changing) distribution of power in a society.

Goredema (2013) preferred to define it as power-sharing agreements. In her view she defined it as a way of accommodating political and military protagonist into working together. Mukoma (2008) defines a GNU as a coalition government designed specifically to accommodate all participating political players in government structures. Chigora and Guzura (2010) defined GNU as the distribution of power among power centers, which is actors in the power games, could share their exercise of control over resources as well as their ability to influence outcomes.

The concept of GNU has emerged as a 'solution' to end civil wars and post-election crisis in different parts of the world. Goredema (2013) is of the opinion that the concept of GNU has originated from the need to "resolve" post election crisis in a given country by regional and international actors. GNU's have become rampant in

Africa due to political confrontations between major political parties and failure to accept defeat in any election. In some countries GNU's have been forged to resolve disputed elections.

GNU's have occurred in many countries around the world. These inclusive governments have been forged in the United Kingdom, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, South Africa, Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Burundi, Kenya, Liberia and Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe had four GNU's, the first was in 1978 which was aimed at ending the Bush war; the second was in 1980; the third in 1987 through the signing of the Unity Accord and lastly the 2009 GNU signed between ZANU-PF and the two MDCs. According to Goredema (2013), "in all these cases; these power-sharing deals have collapsed". This is because power cannot be shared as Goredema (2013) articulates.

Successes of the GNU

The inclusive government managed to slightly address key issues that the country was facing and it brought some sought of sigh of relief. Economically, socially and politically there were some notable positive changes that it yielded during its tenure. Goredema (2013) submitted that the inclusive government scored some notable successes especially in the economic domain by, arresting inflation through the dollarization of the economy. She goes on to argue that "its greatest success, so far (although intangible), has been the raising of people's hope, optimism and generally creating a buoyant public mood". However, the GNU remained precarious and tenuous as there were many key things that were unresolved until it was dismantled.

Social successes

With the formation of GNU, service delivery in towns and cities improved. Mukuhlani (2014) even noted that service delivery in the form of electricity provision, water provision and refuse collection greatly improved. Big hospitals such as Parirenyatwa and Chitungwiza were refurbished and there was great turnaround. Drugs and important equipments to use in hospitals became readily available and this reduced mortality rate. Also pharmacies were full of drugs and medicines at low cost. Life

expectancy which had drastically dropped down improved again.

Schools re-opened. Children at primary and secondary education received free books for basic subjects such as Science, Mathematics and Geography. For secondary schools each student was given free textbooks which were freely given by United Nations Children Education Fund (UNICEF). Universities opened doors to everyone. Salaries began to regain buying power.

Standards of living began to improve. The Diasporas began to come back to Zimbabwe. Food became readily available at affordable prizes all over the country. Poverty was eradicated as government was now able to feed its citizens.

Economic successes

The introduction of multi-currency system such as the use of the American dollar and the South African rand lessened the burden to the general public who were facing cash crisis and hyperinflation. Mukuhlanzi (2014) argue that “this gave birth to stability in the financial sector”. Legendry winding queues that used to be the order of the day disappeared. Business people flock into Zimbabwe seeking investment opportunities. Companies that had scaled down operation improved again. There was job creation and employment increased.

There was the re-birth of defunct services such as the housing, pension, insurance and medical aid scheme. Information Communication Technology (ICT) greatly improved. Through ICT there was the introduction of smart phones which made communication to be fast and easy. Supermarkets re-opened and basic consumer goods such as sugar, cooking oil, and salt became readily available at affordable prizes. Fuel which was previously scarce and only found at black market at exorbitant prize could now be accessed at low cost in all fuel filling stations across the country. As such the transport system also improved and normalized.

Agriculture and mining sectors resurrected. Infrastructure development also improved. Indeed the economy stabilized and great improvements were noticed in many sectors.

Political successes

Although the relationship of ZANU-PF and the two MDCs were sour and differing, they at least managed to work together. In essence, the three managed to put aside political differences for the best of the country. For the first time, the vanguard party (ZANU-PF) and the vanquished (MDC) could sit down together and discuss government business which was impossible in the previous decades. The political landscape was peaceful although there were some cases of political violence perpetrated by both parties here and there. This was also supported by Mukuhlani (2014) who noted that “although there were some cases of violence reported here and there currently Zimbabwe can be regarded as a peaceful country as compared to 2008 where people were being butchered”.

The three parties although they had different political ideologies they successfully drafted and completed a new constitution which was people oriented since citizens participated in the constitution making and was adopted by citizens as the new constitution as compared to before when ZANU-PF adopted the colonial constitution and amended certain laws to keep itself on power. The constitutional referendum was held on 16 and 17 March 2013, and 94,5% voted for it which clearly shows that the people were satisfied with the new constitution born out of the inclusive government (Mukuhlan, 2014).

The new reforms facilitated for the freeing of airwaves as independent radio stations such as ZiFm Stereo, YaFm and Nyaminyami were granted licenses to operate. People could now critique government although there was a feeling of fear among citizens. There was some sought of tolerance and people's freedoms and rights were respected although with time these freedoms died a natural death. As if that is not enough, realizing some notable changes that the inclusive government was making the European Union (EU) laxed and suspended the application of targeted sanctions on senior ZANU-PF government officials and some government institutions.

Challenges

Work done by the inclusive government cannot be praised through and through. Goredema (2013) is of the view that power-sharing deals are most likely to collapse without achieving the ultimate goal. As such the Zimbabwean GNU faced multiple threats. One of the biggest challenges was that the inclusive government was forged under circumstances of sour relationships hence the foundation in which it was formed was shaky.

It was not people driven as such this made it difficult for both parties to stick to the guiding principles of the GPA. This was also supported by Makoni (2012) who argued that “the GNU was not people oriented and hence it was a failure”. A number of key issues which facilitated its formation remained unaddressed. The political terrain although ‘peaceful’ it remained largely volatile as cases of intimidation, malicious prosecutions, detention and hate speeches against members of the two MDCs and civic society leaders continued unabated.

To make matters worse MDC legislators were constantly threatened. According to Goredema (2013) “...in July 2009 the MDC T finance minister Tendai Biti, received a parcel containing a live 9mm bullet and a warning to “prepare your will”. Others were arrested for critiquing Robert Mugabe whereas some find themselves behind bars being kept by criminals. The situation was no different to that of colonial era where political “criminals” found themselves in colonial jails on frivolous charges and malicious prosecutions as one that was testified by Ruth Chinamano as recorded in Mazambani (2013) that “I didn’t know that prisons are places where criminals keep innocent people. I discovered that colonial jails were meant for innocent people looked after by criminals...I and other nationalists were neither criminals nor murderers who deserved neither to be labeled terrorists nor to be in jail...” This was the exact same situation in Zimbabwe during the GNU’s tenure as many were jailed on political grounds not on evidenced of crimes committed.

The human rights situation remained perilous. Journalist, human rights activists and legal practitioners were constantly threatened, ill-treated, harassed and denied the freedom to enjoy the provisions enshrined in GPA agreement. Night searches, seizure of properties and tracking of key political actors remained firm on the

ground.

Civic society organizations and churches were left out of the negotiations as such the inclusive government was a failure because these groups had pushed for negotiations and had their own grievances, but on the table they were left behind. Pertaining to media reforms, the inclusive government failed to bring meaningful progress. The state owned media continued to propagate ZANU-PF propaganda and hate speeches against the MDC. Goredema (2013) said that “parties at the GPA agreed that state media should desist from propagating hate language but clearly this is not happening”. Draconian and punitive media laws which prevented free media such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) and the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) were neither removed in the statute books nor amended.

The inclusive government though on paper power was shared, the reality on the ground showed that power was vested in the president. The post of the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister were more like symbolic posts that did not have or contain real power. Despite that the prime minister was the second in command, he could not make final decisions but rather final decisions were made by the president. On top of that, to show that the GNU had some challenges is that key ministries such as defence, home affairs, foreign affairs and information were kept on ZANU-PF’s side despite efforts by the MDCs to share them equally.

As for Goredema (2013) the inclusive government was made up of parties with nothing in common, composed of people with different personalities coming together in the name of buying peace at all cost. In most of Mugabe’s speeches he made it clear that ZANU-PF and the MDC were different meaning to say they were like water and fire. In his (Mugabe) speech at the signing of the GNU in February 2009, Mugabe reminded the two MDCs and said that “...ZANU-PF remains in power...”

From the onset, the inclusive government was focused on political posts rather than delivering services to the people. The cabinet was too big with no intention to arrest corruption, economic doldrums and political mayhem. According to Mukuhlani (2014) the cabinet was meant to ensure that politicians from all parties benefited from government resources. Some ministries had double ministers which drained government resources. On top of that the two MDCs entered into the inclusive

government sympathetic about the citizens whose lives were in a sorry state not merely that they wanted to be part of it. As such, there was slow progress in terms of bringing back sanity as the GNU was characterized by squabbles and politics of procrastination.

There were lots of business meetings, workshops and travelling in and outside the country by senior government officials on the so-called “government business” but with little outcome. More funds were being channeled towards these foreign trips and meetings which were never ending rather than putting more money towards health, education and agriculture sectors among others that needed more push to keep them running.

In the judiciary, the inclusive government was expected to bring new reforms and make sure that the judiciary was independent, but by the end of the GNU's tenure the judiciary system was never independent so as other government institutions such as Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC), Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC), Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission (ZACC) and security institutions. Mukuhani (2014) noted that “...none of these have been highly effective as they have been under-funded”. This threatened the prospects of sustainable or durable peace as malicious prosecutions and conniving continued worse than before. As such the GNU was a failure.

The constitution making which was one of the GPA's aims that is to come up with a people oriented constitution was delayed due to disagreements among the political parties. Even Madhuku (2010) mentioned that the constitution making process had evidence of bickering features that characterized the constitution making process. ZANU-PF was unwilling to new reforms because new reforms were regarded as a threat to its hold on power whereas to the two MDCs they were pushing for new reforms hoping to arrest the problems that Zimbabwe was experiencing. As such, it took a prolonged period to complete the constitution and when it was completed there were still a number of unresolved issues.

In terms of economic recovery, although the inclusive government managed to bring sanity as basic commodities in supermarkets were readily available at cheap prize, there was flooding of foreign goods in the country so much that local industries were faced with competitive threats. For example, by 2011 Chinese shoddy products

had flooded in the country at cheap price, affecting local industries and products as people rushed for Chinese cheap products. Furthermore, some people mostly in rural areas were still finding it difficult to live a normal life as both parties focused much in urban areas. Even though, water provisions, refuse collection and electricity provisions remained a challenge in towns as some areas could experience power cuts, late refuse collection and receive untreated water.

Worse of, there was the militarization of all key government institutions including those that were supposed to remain independent and civic. A number of senior army officers were retired and brought into the government while senior retired service chiefs were called back and appointed into various government departments and chaired committees.

Another challenge the inclusive government faced was that the two warring parties were preaching different doctrines and having completely different political ideologies. ZANU-PF was emphasizing more on protecting liberation gains and being vigilant to western imperialism, but the MDC's were emphasizing on re-engagement with everyone including Western powers and preaching the gospel of democracy and job creation. That alone compromised the work of the inclusive government to the extent that they were fights between ZANU-PF and the two MDC's.

From the analysis shown in this paper, it is clear that GNU's on the African continent in particular Zimbabwe are not a permanent solution to the multiple crises experienced. It has been observed that, inclusive governments can never achieve the ultimate goal or resolve problems permanently because they are forged under circumstances of mistrusts, unwillingness and disputes hence they are temporal solutions to ease crises, but with long term effects.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, the Zimbabwean inclusive government was a failure to bring sustainable or durable peace and sanity to the Zimbabwean people to a greater extent. It failed the people of Zimbabwe. From the onset, although it brought some sigh of relief in the country which was shown by the resurrection of defunct services

and re-opening of closed companies accompanied by improved standards of living and availability of commodity consumer goods at affordable prizes, this was just a temporal measure to just walk through a tumultuous moment as things started to deteriorate again after the conclusion of the inclusive government's tenure. For ZANU-PF the inclusive government was the best "garage" for it to rest after a prolonged period of much struggling to keep the country running, but to MDC the GNU was a honeymoon moment as for the first time they enjoyed the privilege of being in inclusive government. The researchers hope is that, Zimbabwe will not have in future another inclusive government as evidence has proved that GNU's are temporal solutions that are forged on unstable foundations.

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